

Briefing Paper

Pacific Northwest Region – Regional Office

Eastside Restoration Strategy Update 7 21 March 2014

The human brain is built to compare; it's Darwinian to consider an alternative when one presents itself.

Helen Fisher

Where we've been:

Scoping for Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project was completed resulting in 57 responses from interested parties, and generating 959 individual comments. Utilizing a new content analysis tool designed for this project, these comments were categorized and synthesized for the responsible official, who identified three significant issues to carry forward into alternative development.

Where we are:

Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project:

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) is developing alternatives and analyzing the effects, participating in collaborative workshops, and consulting with Tribal members and County officials.

One big lesson learned: the accelerated timeline requires a “learning-by-doing approach” and emphasizes the importance of “early and often” consultation. The IDT has been providing NEPA education to the Collaboratives as they move through the process. For example, the Wallowa Whitman Forest Collaborative’s February meeting was devoted to learning about how the Forest Service goes from public comments to issues to alternatives, within the context of Lower Joseph Creek project. Additionally, Wallowa County and the Nez Perce tribe have been participating regularly in IDT meetings aimed to meet our commitment to “early and often” consultation, which is extremely challenging given the timeline.

Other Projects:

The Blue Mountains Restoration IDT started work on the second large-scale project: the Blues-wide strategic fuel breaks project. The initial maps have been shared with the Blue Mountains Cohesive Wildfire Strategy Pilot steering committee and Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) staff.

At a broader scale, team members are working with Blue Mountains silviculturists, area ecologists, and scientists from the PNW station and NGOs to create a landscape scale analysis process that will be useful at multiple scales to help place planning areas in the proper ecological context. The Lower Joseph project will be the first test case.



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We are also helping develop and test several climate change tools (a vegetation modeling tool and a vulnerability assessment process) to better consider the likely future vegetation conditions in project planning.

Where we're going:

Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project:

Alternative development and effects analysis work continues with field reviews planned for late this spring and early summer. The Draft EIS should be ready for release and public comment this summer.

Blues-wide strategic fuel breaks project:

The IDT is working with Forests to validate the four-forest initial map of fuel break locations. We will be working with ODF and internally to refine and validate this proposal this spring. Once the project proposal is validated, a Purpose and Need with Proposed Action will be released for public review and comment this field season. This project has received plenty of attention, both from public groups and from within the Forest Service and we look forward to strengthening internal and external collaboration and communication.

Other Projects/Engagement:

The Blue Mountains Restoration IDT in partnership with the State of Oregon is developing a priority data collection strategy which includes LiDAR/stand exams, and botany and heritage surveys across the Blue Mountains to implement this year. The Forest Service has committed \$625,000, leveraging another \$600,000 from the State of Oregon for this effort.

Tribal Relations:

As we move forward in alternative development and effects analysis for Lower Joseph Creek Restoration Project, and begin analysis for the Strategic Fuel Breaks and Dry Forest Restoration Projects, we will continue to uphold our Federal Trust Responsibility to enter into government to government and staff to staff consultation with our tribal neighbors. It is imperative our decisions are informed by environmental analysis that recognizes and considers Tribal Rights, values, interests, concerns and land stewardship goals.

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